

Question: What are the planned activities at the Tar Creek Superfund Site?

Answer: Operable Unit 1 (OU1) – Groundwater monitoring and well plugging continue to ensure the Roubidoux Aquifer (drinking water aquifer) is protected.

OU2 – Residential property cleanups continue in order to protect the children. Comparisons of blood data from 1997 to 2000 show a 50% decrease in the number of children with blood lead concentrations equal to or greater than the 10 micrograms per deciliter (ug/dL) standard set by the Center for Disease Control.

OU3 – The Eagle-Pitcher Office Complex work is completed. Abandoned chemicals were removed. No further action is required.

OU4 – Negotiations continue for an Administrative Order on Consent (AOC) with the Potential Responsible Parties (PRPs) to perform and finance the Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study (RI/FS).

Question: What is the status of the residential soil (OU2) cleanup?

Answer: As of September 9, 2003, 1,907 properties have been remediated. This phase of residential yard remediation is scheduled to be completed in October 2003.

Question: What is EPA's position on relocation?

Answer: The EPA prefers to clean up and restore properties so people can stay in their homes, and since cleanup is possible at Tar Creek, relocation was not part of the remedy. At this time, we have no plans for relocation.

Question: Does the community agree with the cleanup?

Answer: The State and the Tribes agreed with the 1997 remedy decision to cleanup the residential properties. It is our understanding that the community is now divided on this issue.

Question: What is the status of negotiations with the potentially responsible parties and the U. S. Department of Interior (DOI) for a RI/FS for the mining wastes (OU4)?

Answer: Negotiations for an AOC with DOI, Gold Fields Mining Corporation, and Blue T Corp. are ongoing and nearing completion. Under the AOC, these parties will perform and finance the RI/FS for Operable Unit 4 - mining wastes (chat piles and flotation ponds).

Question: What is the scope of the OU4?

Answer: The scope of OU4 is limited to chat piles, floatation ponds, and chat bases. We intend to address the major sources of lead contamination in this area.

Question: Is OU4 the final operable unit for the Tar Creek Superfund site? If not, what is the next step?

Answer: It is our intent to eliminate major sources of lead contamination in this area. After completion of OU4, we will evaluate the site condition and determine if any further actions are required.

Question: What is the status of activities associated with the May 2003 Memorandum of Understanding between the EPA, DOI, and U. S Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)?

Answer: A steering Committee was formed in Washington D.C.. At the regional level, we have engaged with USACE as a partner to develop a holistic approach for Tar Creek area. The USACE is working on an Expanded Reconnaissance Phase Watershed Management Plan formulation for Tar Creek and Spring River Watershed.

BACKGROUND: In 1983, the Tar Creek Superfund Site in Ottawa County is placed on the National Priorities List (NPL). The 40 square mile site, located in northeast Oklahoma, involves five mining towns and other areas where mining wastes were deposited. The site is currently divided into four operable units:

- OU1 – Surface and Groundwater;
- OU2 – Lead contaminated surface soils on residential properties and public areas (i.e., schools, day cares, parks, Indian lands);
- OU3 – Abandoned mining chemicals at the Eagle-Picher Office Complex located in Cardin, Oklahoma.
- OU4 - Mining wastes (i.e., chat piles, flotation ponds, chat bases).

Two Records of Decision (ROD) and two 5-Year Reviews are performed. The first ROD is for OU1 (signed June 6, 1984) and addresses: (1) the surface water degradation by the discharge of acid mine water; and (2) the threat of contamination of the Roubidoux Aquifer, the drinking water supply. Dikes and berms are constructed to prevent surface water from entering the mines and recharging the Boone Aquifer, which would reduce the acid discharge to the surface water. Deep abandoned wells with cracked casings are also plugged to prevent the downward migration of acid mine water into the Roubidoux Aquifer.

A second ROD, signed on August 27, 1997, addresses lead contaminated surface soils in residential areas. Remediation of lead contaminated properties is on going since 1996. As of September 9, 2003, approximately 1,907 lead-contaminated residential properties are remediated. Superfund monies are disbursed to the county, cities and towns to provide for repair to county, city and town roads.

Two Five-Year Reviews (April 1994 and April 2000) are performed to determine/monitor the effectiveness of the above actions. The findings of the last Report determine that the environmental components of the Water Quality Standards are not being met, but do not pose a human health threat. The Report reiterates the finding of the OU1 ROD that the action taken to address surface water contamination was appropriate when balanced against the availability of Superfund monies for use at other sites. That is, the massive costs associated with any engineering solution for surface water contamination that poses an environmental threat (but not a human health threat) in the Tar Creek Basin is prohibitively high, and expenditures to meet those costs would drain Superfund dollars needed for other sites.

After-Action Monitoring Program begins in 1987. The purpose of the Program is to determine whether the poor quality of drinking water in several Roubidoux wells is due to acid mine water infiltrating directly into the Roubidoux Aquifer from the Boone Formation, or whether the acid mine water is migrating into the Roubidoux Aquifer through deteriorated casings in the municipal water wells.

Negotiations for OU4 RI/FS are initiated in December 2000, with the issuance of a Special Notice letter, draft AOC, and a draft Statement of Work (SOW) to the PRPs, Doe Run Resources Corporation, Gold Fields Mining Corporation, and NL Industries, Inc. From December 2000 to January 2003, negotiations are difficult due to: (1) the amount of time required for the PRPs to develop a funding agreement; (2) the complexity of the site; and (3) ASARCO Inc., Childress Royalty Company, Inc., Doe Run Resources Corporation, and NL Industries, Inc., pull out of the negotiations.

In May 2003, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the EPA, the DOI, and the USACE is signed. The purpose of this MOU is to facilitate a coordinated response to environmental contamination, physical safety concerns (including open mine shafts, subsidence, and flooding), and poor economic conditions at the Tar Creek Mining Area of Oklahoma.